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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH LAW MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Butenis, reasons para 1.4d

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Law Minister Ahmed stated that legislation to separate the judiciary from the executive branch will be presented to parliament before the caretaker government takes over in October. He agreed to support a financial crimes task force and accepted RLA's assistance in drafting language for a provision to include "international cooperation" in the Anti-Terrorism Act. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On April 23, Ambassador paid an introductory call on Law Minister Moudud Ahmed. Present at the 30-minute meeting were Attorney General Muhammad Ali, Additional Secretary Chowdhury, and RLA (notetaker).

¶3. (C) Ahmed stated that the BDG is preparing legislation following a High Court order which, in the next six years, will phase out magistrates appointed by the executive branch and replace them with those appointed by the judiciary. The next session of Parliament is very short, he noted, but the judiciary bill will be presented after the budget is passed. He said that the measure faced stiff opposition from BNP MPs who do not want to lose their power over judicial appointments.

¶4. (SBU) Asked about the implementation status of the 2004 EPZ labor rights law. Ahmed said that in accordance with the law welfare organizations at factories have been phased out and workers can now form "associations" at the factory level. If a company has five factories, there would be five associations, but they would have to bargain with employers as a group. The next and final phase of the law will be the introduction of federations of labor organizations.

¶5. (C) With regard to the draft Anti-Terrorism Law, Ahmed stated that a provision for international cooperation was removed at a cabinet meeting. He said Bangladesh did not want to be compelled to share information with "unfriendly" countries. (Note: "Unfriendly" means India.) The same effect, he claimed, could be achieved with an administrative order. Ahmed welcomed Ambassador's suggestion that RLA work with the Law Ministry on draft language to save the provision.

¶6. (SBU) Ahmed agreed to the Ambassador's proposal that the Law Ministry support RLA's initiative to set up a financial crimes task force with dedicated prosecutors working side by side with law enforcement and the central bank.

¶7. (SBU) Ahmed stated that his recent trip to the U.S. was "very good". He met with the World Bank about their legal strengthening program in Bangladesh, and received a briefing at the Justice Department on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Ahmed said he launched a campaign for using ADR in civil cases. As a result, 9,000 cases in Bangladesh have been

resolved through ADR, each one of which could have taken years of litigation.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Passage of the judiciary separation legislation is a crucial step to an independent judiciary. The legislation was speeded up by a recent High Court order threatening 12 government officials with contempt of court for ignoring prior Court orders on this matter over the last four years. Separation of the judiciary was also a BNP campaign promise in 2001.  
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